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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Ref: Kuwait 2803

1. Summary: The Department of State Trafficking in Persons report and widespread media coverage of a subsequent Embassy-sponsored DVC on the issue with Ambassador John Miller (reftel) has moved some Kuwaiti commentators to acknowledge human rights abuses, but rarely do they concede that such abuse is anything other than isolated anomalies. Far more common is the counter-accusation, with alleged American abuses at Guantanamo Bay being the most frequently cited case of American hypocrisy. Writing in Al-Watan on June 25, Walid Bu Ruba' wrote: "To Mr. Miller we would like to say that the U.S. must recognize the rights of the detainees in Guantanamo. These people have been sitting in their cells without trials." End Summary.

2. Writing in independent daily Al-Watan in a column entitled, "The One-Eyed Strategy of the State Department" on June 25, Walid Bu Ruba' wrote: "No Kuwaiti can ignore the U.S. efforts in liberating Kuwait from [Saddam.] No American citizen can ignore the role of Kuwait in the liberation of Iraq. As a result of this, Kuwait has been classified as an ally to the U.S. in the NATO alliance.

However, when Ambassador Miller spoke the other day to a panel of journalists on Trafficking of Persons, he gave Kuwait a low mark and said that Kuwait has not done anything to prevent the trafficking of persons. To Mr. Miller we would like to say that the U.S. must recognize the rights of the detainees in Guantanamo. These people have been sitting in their cells without trials. Human rights is a standard concept and it must not be selective. If we evaluate the U.S. on its treatment of these detainees, then America will rank at the bottom of the list in the human rights category."

3. Writing in pro-government daily Al-Anba in a column entitled "We Also Have Respected Servants" on June 25, Abdul Hadi Al-Saleh wrote: "In addition to the negative image of how some maids and workers are mistreated in Kuwait, we have other positive stories where maids are well treated in Kuwaiti families. Maids and housekeepers get a separate room in the household, they accompany the family on their summer and winter travels, they are well taken care of and they even receive gifts on gift-giving occasions. That is why we find some maids stay here for ten years and sometimes more without going back to their home country. The media must portray this side of the equation. I am not denying that we have some cases of abuse and mistreatment of housekeepers. The government and the interested authorities must deal with this issue. We have laws and regulations that must be implemented."

4. Writing in Al-Qabas in a column entitled "America Trades in Persons for Sex," on June 26, Islamist Adel Al-Qassar wrote: "On Wednesday [6/22] Ambassador Miller told the reporters who participated in a DVC on the Trafficking in Persons Report that he welcomed any assessment of the U.S. violations of human rights and trafficking in persons. If Mr. Miller sees that the information which U.S. embassies provide on the status of trafficking in persons in other countries is the source of his report, we can ask our embassy in Washington to give us information on the trafficking of children for sexual purposes in the United States. The comments of the Parliament Speaker in Kuwait is the best reply to Ambassador Miller's statements. [National Assembly Speaker] Mr. Al-Khorafi said, 'if you live in a house of glass, do not throw stones.'"

5. Writing in Al-Qabas on June 25, Yousef Al-Shihab wrote: "It is easy to point the finger at other countries and accuse them of practicing violations against human rights. But it is difficult to come up with solid evidence to back up these allegations. The accusations against Kuwait, especially on the issues of treatment of expatriate workers and camel jockeys, are a wrong that others want to prove as right.

International organizations attest that Kuwait has an outstanding record of fairness in treating human beings regardless of whether they are citizens or residents. The cases of abuse and mistreatment are isolated cases by sick people and these actions are abhorred by the Kuwaiti society. We do not deny the existence of these random and few cases."

16. Writing in Al-Watan on June 25, Mubarak Al-Hajeri wrote: "Nobody can claim Kuwait is not committed to international human rights, even John Miller, advisor to the State Department and the director of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office. Yes, we admit some individual mistakes and practices, but the perpetrators are not in the majority. In the meantime, we must concede the Kuwaiti government has instituted laws to protect the foreign manpower in the country better than any country in the world including the United States . What does Ambassador Miller have to say about the injustice meted out to inmates of the Guantanamo X-Ray Camp in Cuba? And what about the human rights of American blacks? And what about those millions of vagabonds who sleep in garbage containers in Washington DC and other U.S. states? I think in this context Jassem Al-Khorafi was right when he was quoted as saying, 'those who live in glass houses must not throw stones at others.'"

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